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SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS

United Nations information centres in 1994: allocation of resources from the regular budget of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In paragraph 11 of its resolution 49/38 B of 9 December 1994, the General Assembly took note of the report of the Secretary-General regarding the allocation of resources to United Nations information centres in 1993 and called upon him "to continue to study ways and means to rationalize and effect equitable disbursement of available resources to all United Nations information centres and report thereon to the Committee on Information at its seventeenth session".

2. In paragraph 9 of the same resolution, the General Assembly took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the results of the integration of certain information centres on a trial basis and invited "the Secretary-General to continue the exercise of integrating United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) whenever feasible, on a case-by-case basis, and taking into account the views of the host country, while ensuring that the information functions of the United Nations information centres are not adversely affected, and to report to the Committee on Information".

3. In paragraph 16 of the same resolution, the General Assembly took note of the action being taken by the Secretary-General regarding the reactivation of the information centre in Tehran and called upon the Secretary-General "to report to the Committee on Information at its seventeenth substantive session on the full reactivation of that information centre".

4. The present report is submitted to the Committee on Information in response to the above-mentioned requests. It includes the comments of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat on the work of the information centres during 1994; the status of the integration exercise; ongoing efforts to strengthen the information centres within available resources; the funding provided in 1994 to information centres from the regular budget of the United Nations for local operational expenses, including rental of premises; and host government contributions received for 1994.

5. The report reflects the work programmes of the 59 information centres that were operational during 1994. It does not include United Nations information services located in Geneva and Vienna, whose budgetary allocations are separately identified under section 24, Public information, of the programme budget; nor does it deal with the information services of the four regional commissions other than the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), which operate within the administrative and budgetary mandates of each commission.

II. ROLE OF INFORMATION CENTRES

6. Over the reporting period, the activities of the centres, like the Department in its entirety, were geared to meet new requirements for projecting a stronger image of the United Nations as directed by the Secretary-General. Intensified efforts were undertaken with the aim of:

(a) Ensuring cost-effective performance by the centres in reaching out to key audiences;

(b) Pooling resources with other members of the system wherever feasible;

(c) Increasing the production of regionally adapted information material in local languages;

(d) Mobilizing support for the issues discussed at major international conferences relating to development;

(e) Establishing partnerships with redisseminators of information in host countries;

(f) Exploring new communications technologies for the exchange of information with Headquarters, other field offices and the media.

In the light of the essential role of communications technology, the Department is making every attempt to provide information centres with the necessary training and equipment to perform their work.

7. The Secretary-General, on 23 January 1995, met in Geneva with a group of information professionals from information centres to discuss present challenges before the Organization and the consequent responsibilities of its network of information centres. The meeting, convened by the Assistant Secretary-General, was the first such opportunity for United Nations information professionals in the field to have a Secretary-General discuss with them the crucial importance

of public information for the Organization. The Secretary-General encouraged efforts by the centres to publicize United Nations success stories, especially in the fields of social and economic development; he stressed the need for an active approach towards the media, particularly with regard to countering negative media comments on the United Nations; he expressed his appreciation for innovative approaches by centres to ensure the publication of key national and regional aspects of his statements and reports; and he suggested new efforts that would result in funding for information activities in partnership with both the public and the private sectors. During the discussion, the Secretary-General emphasized that information efforts should specifically focus on the younger generation. Most importantly, information centres were urged to continue in a proactive manner the promotion of development issues before the Organization to emphasize the many achievements of the United Nations over the past 50 years and to garner the support of people around the world as the Organization prepares itself for the challenges of the new millennium.

III. FUNCTIONS PERFORMED BY UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION CENTRES

8. In paragraph 8 of its resolution 49/38 B, the General Assembly reaffirmed "the importance attached by Member States to the role of United Nations information centres in effectively and comprehensively disseminating information, particularly in developing countries and countries in transition, about United Nations activities". The year 1994 was marked by an expanded role for information centres in promoting understanding and support for the Organization's many activities, in particular with regard to the issues of social and economic development, including the convening of international conferences on those issues; the Organization's intensified peace-keeping and peacemaking efforts; and the system-wide preparations for the Organization's fiftieth anniversary.

9. To meet the challenge, the information centres strengthened their outreach programmes in host countries to government offices, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations agencies and programmes and the general public. Besides disseminating press releases and other information materials produced at Headquarters, information centres published periodic newsletters, which proved to be among their most effective communications tools. Several information centres, particularly in Africa and Latin America, organized journalists' tours to development projects carried out by United Nations agencies and programmes in their countries. A number of information centres regularly coproduced local-language television programmes on United Nations topics in partnership with local broadcasting organizations.

10. During 1994, the information centres played a pivotal role in promoting the Organization's major conferences. For the International Conference on Population and Development, the advance promotional activities conducted by the information centres helped to raise the level of interest in the issues and kept the media and the public informed of developments related to the Conference. Twenty-eight information centres undertook pre-Conference media encounters, as well as briefings by population experts for television and radio journalists. They translated documents, backgrounders and other information materials into local languages including Bahasa-Indonesia, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, Hindi,

Italian, Kiswahili, Nepali, Norwegian, Romanian and Swedish, and distributed them widely in the countries they serve.

11. A special role in support of the Population Conference was played by the United Nations Information Centre in Cairo, which mobilized regional press to enhance coverage before and during the visit of the Secretary-General and facilitated daily Arabic press briefings by providing ad hoc interpretation services and media relations support to the large contingent of Arabic-speaking press in attendance at the Conference. Many information centres organized thorough briefings, seminars, round tables, television and radio discussions and created issue-specific journalists' networks to provide in-depth information on population themes. Feedback received from the information centres (7,500 articles from 432 newspapers) indicated the most extensive media coverage ever achieved for a United Nations conference.

12. The information centres were also fully engaged in providing support for the regional preparatory meetings for the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. The information centres in Buenos Aires, Dakar and Jakarta were closely involved with the regional preparatory meetings of the Women's Conference in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia and the Pacific. Also, information centres translated the pre-conference brochure and backgrounders into 19 local languages and engaged in diverse promotional activities, including: organizing journalists round tables, briefings and seminars; inaugurating networks of women journalists to facilitate greater access to and coverage of issues relating to women; co-producing television and radio programmes related to the advancement of women; and publishing feature articles in newspaper supplements devoted to issues of concern to women. The information centres in London and Washington provided support in organizing a series of regional journalists round tables for the Social Summit. In addition, more than 20 United Nations information centres translated the Social Summit press kit materials into local languages, and 15 United Nations information centres, working closely with national committees for the Summit, United Nations Associations and national NGOs, undertook outreach activities to brief journalists about Summit issues. During the Summit, information centres relayed press releases and other conference information received daily from the Conference site in Copenhagen to local media by E-mail and fax; they responded to the many queries from the media and NGOs; and they provided, on a daily basis, press clippings and reports to the spokesperson of the Bella Centre in Copenhagen, reflecting local and national media coverage of the proceedings.

13. The positive achievements of the information centres in heightening the awareness of conferences on social development issues was partly attributable to the availability of funds from within the budget of the Department of Public Information. The amounts of $35,000 provided by the Department for the Population Conference, $35,000 for the Women's Conference, and $75,000 for the Social Summit enabled the information centres to extend their outreach programmes to wider audiences, to engage other United Nations partners and to approach conference promotions with greater creativity.

14. The information centres paid special attention to stimulating a national response and commitment to promoting the fiftieth anniversary observance. From

within existing resources, the information centres initiated and/or facilitated the establishment of Fiftieth Anniversary National Committees in over 70 countries and worked closely with these committees in the development of educational projects related to this event. The information centres were also involved in the dissemination of public information on the fiftieth anniversary to United Nations Associations, NGOs, educational institutions and the media.

15. Greece, Nigeria, Portugal and the United Kingdom were among the countries where information centres have been instrumental in creating a dialogue on the integration of education programmes about the United Nations in school curricula. Information centres continued to cooperate with local sponsors and United Nations system partners in the implementation of local fiftieth anniversary promotional projects, such as model United Nations assemblies, seminars, concerts and travelling exhibits. To mark the fiftieth anniversary, the United Nations Information Centre in Windhoek added two new local language versions of the Charter of the United Nations - Afrikaans and Ovambo - to the collection of 29 local-language editions available thus far.

16. Cooperation with United Nations agencies and programmes formed a major part of the work of the information centres during 1994. Information centres participated in or organized media liaison activities in connection with the launch of the Human Development Report, the World Investment Report, The State of the World's Children and The World Population Report. They also assisted United Nations field offices with the promotion of observances such as World Food Day, International Women's Day, World Environment Day, the International Year of the Family, the Decade of Indigenous People and World AIDS Day, among others.

17. With respect to United Nations peace-keeping and other political missions, the information centres responded to queries from the media and other sources and provided information on resolutions of the Security Council and reports of the Secretary-General. Furthermore, the information centre libraries remained a vital resource for up-to-date documents, publications and videos. The centres cooperated extensively with foreign ministries, academic institutions, United Nations associations and national NGOs in organizing seminars, exhibits, workshops and other events related to these issues.

18. In keeping with their mandate, the information centres played an active role before and during official visits of the Secretary-General and senior officials of the United Nations to their respective areas. They organized official schedules, press conferences and interviews, disseminated statements by the spokesperson for the Secretary-General, prepared press reviews and provided media liaison, interpretation and other support services for these visits.

IV. THE INTEGRATION EXERCISE

19. In keeping with the request of the Committee on Information, every effort has been made by the Department of Public Information to facilitate the process of integrating United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices whenever feasible, on a case-by-case basis, and taking into account the views of the host country.

20. Information centres that were already integrated continued in 1994 to carry out the Department's mandate under the immediate supervision of UNDP resident representatives and with regular programmatic and administrative guidance from the Department's Information Centres Service.

21. Closer cooperation was established between the UNDP field offices and the information centres in Beirut, Bujumbura, Dar es Salaam, Dhaka, Khartoum, Lima and Lusaka, where resident representatives have been functioning as acting directors of the information centres.

22. Discussions regarding further integration have continued on a case-by-case basis between representatives of the UNDP and the Department at Headquarters. However, steps towards formal integration will be taken only following consultation with host Governments.

V. STRENGTHENING OF THE UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION CENTRES

23. The Department of Public Information paid special attention to enhancing the effectiveness of the information centres with several new appointments. Department directors were appointed to information centres in Buenos Aires, Copenhagen, Harare, Manila, Mexico City and Ouagadougou. A stronger United Nations information presence was established in Tehran with the appointment of a professional Information Officer, and a new information centre was established at Sana'a. Further conversion of Information Assistants to the National Information Officer category has also been accomplished; 29 such posts have now been converted.

24. A briefing programme for a small group of National Information Officers and Information Assistants took place at Headquarters in March 1995. In addition, a training and orientation workshop on technological innovations and electronic access to United Nations information is planned for information centre Reference Assistants in cooperation with the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and agencies of the United Nations system in New York.

25. As recommended by the Committee on Information, the information centres continued to work closely with United Nations system representatives in the field, cooperating with system partners such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNDP, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in the planning, implementation and funding of joint information programmes. These efforts allowed for more effective and far-reaching information programmes as well as wider dissemination of United Nations materials, and contributed to the maintenance of a cohesive image of the Organization in the field.

26. As a result of local partnerships with members of the United Nations family, information centres were able to develop joint system publications incorporating items on the work of the agencies in the country. In other instances, information centres played the lead role in information-sharing. For example, in an effort to reach over 200 million Portuguese-speaking people, the United Nations Information Centres in Rio de Janeiro and Lisbon translated major

United Nations reports, documents and information materials into Portuguese and shared them with UNDP offices in Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Sao Tome and Principe. An Agenda for Development, The State of the World's Children, The Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization and the Human Development Report, as well as several Department fact sheets and backgrounders, were among the materials translated and distributed last year.

27. Cost-sharing and better access to United Nations system information has been achieved in Manila and Buenos Aires where the library resources of the information centre and several agencies have been centralized. This example is now being considered by other information centres. In cooperation with the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, efforts have been made to upgrade and modernize information centre libraries with the provision of cataloguing software such as Micro CDS/ISIS and DBase III Plus. The information centres in Buenos Aires, Colombo, Copenhagen, Lima, Lisbon, Panama, Rome and Windhoek have received such assistance.

28. Currently, information centre libraries are being supplied with up-to-date computerized bibliographic materials including Security Council resolutions dating from 1974, General Assembly resolutions from 1977 and Economic and Social Council resolutions from 1982, as well as major United Nations documents such as An Agenda for Peace, Agenda 21 and other United Nations publications on diskette.

29. Action has been taken by the Department to equip as many information centres as resources allow with computers as well as word-processing and desktop publishing software, in order to improve communications, simplify and streamline reporting, and facilitate local production of Department information materials.

30. Thirty-eight information centres now have the capacity to communicate with Headquarters by electronic mail. This facility has improved the ability of these centres to obtain and rapidly disseminate information. Information centres not connected by E-mail receive these materials by fax or cable: statements by the Secretary-General, selected Department press releases, Security Council resolutions and reports, the Daily Highlights and other United Nations materials of immediate public interest. Many centres then transmit United Nations news to the local media by fax.

VI. DISBURSEMENT OF RESOURCES FROM THE REGULAR BUDGET IN 1994

31. The operational funds made available to the Department of Public Information for disbursement to the United Nations information centres are intended primarily for their maintenance and upkeep. They cover rental and maintenance of premises, utilities, communications, maintenance of equipment, local transportation, stationery and office supplies, library supplies, office and electronic equipment and freight and handling charges for shipment of equipment and supplies.

32. Some funds are provided for local translation and printing of information material and for travel within the area serviced by the information centre. Funds are also provided for hospitality. The allocation of non-staff operating

funds is conducted on a pragmatic basis, taking into account the actual requirements of each information centre, the availability of funds and the existing circumstances in each host country. For 1994, the regular budget resources allocated to information centres, excluding salaries and common staff costs, amounted to $4,540,400.

33. The difference in the disbursement of funds to individual information centres is primarily related to the cost of living in the host country concerned. In some cases the difference in allocation can be significant, especially if the host country does not provide rent-free premises. An overview of the disbursement for rental of premises in 1994 is provided in the annex to the present report.

34. Operational funds for every information centre have to be provided from the Department's regular budget at the beginning of each year, even for those information centres for which host government financial support is anticipated.

35. It should also be noted that there is no fixed schedule for the submission of contributions by host Governments. Furthermore, the levels of some host government contributions fluctuate and cannot be projected or anticipated with accuracy. The past few years have seen a decline in total contributions received, while the cost of operating the information centres has risen following general increases in the cost of living.

36. Limited regular budget resources make it even more important to encourage and promote the active involvement and support of Governments, United Nations Associations, NGOs, educational institutions and other interest groups. Information centres are actively engaged in enlisting such support and regularly contact organizations that may provide direct financial and/or other assistance for their outreach efforts.

VII. HOST GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR THE INFORMATION CENTRES

37. During 1994, extrabudgetary funding in the form of voluntary ad hoc contributions in cash or kind towards the operating costs of several information centres decreased, despite increased pledges. The decrease in support reduced the ability of some information centres to realize operational goals.

38. The steady decline in funding for the information centres has occurred since the 1990-1991 biennium. Contributions by Member States have fallen by some 50 per cent since the 1990-1991 biennium, when contributions totalled over $3.5 million. In the 1992-1993 biennium, government contributions fell to $1.3 million and reached a low point of just over $500,000 in 1994.

39. However, it must be pointed out that the financial support provided by several host Governments has been invaluable to the operation of information centres. This year the Department has received or expects to receive contributions in cash or kind from 40 Member States hosting United Nations information centres. Fifteen Governments have provided rent-free premises. Thirteen Governments have provided a cash contribution, while 12 provided both

rent-free premises as well as a cash contribution. Nineteen host Governments did not provide any support.

40. A breakdown of host Government support for 1994 for the 59 information centres that are currently operational is contained in the annex to the present report.

Annex

ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES FOR RENTAL OF PREMISES AND HOST GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

Centre	Established	Department of Public Information posts	Rental of premises in 1994 (US$)	Host government support		
				Agreement signed	Extrabudgetary staff costs	Cash contribution received for 1994 (US$)
Accra	March 58	P-4, 5 local staff	Rent free			
Algiers a/	Sept. 63	4 local staff	Rent free			
Ankara a/	March 75	2 local staff	6 000	Jan. 75		
Antananarivo a/	Jan. 63	2 local staff	10 000			
Asunción a/	Oct. 62	2 local staff	6 000			
Athens	April 54	5 local staff	42 334	Oct. 92		40 221
Beirut	Sept. 62	5 local staff	b/			
Santa Fe de Bogotá	May 54	5 local staff	54 100	1955		70 000
Brazzaville	June 83	5 local staff	Rent free	June 83		
Brussels	Jan. 75	5 local staff	60 775	Jan. 76		67 484
Bucharest a/	June 70	1 local staff	Rent free	April 70	5 local staff	2 976
Buenos Aires	Nov. 48	P-4, 5 local staff	Rent free			70 140
Bujumbura	June 61	4 local staff	Rent free			Not received since 1992
Cairo a/	April 49	5 local staff	240			234
Colombo a/	Aug. 61	4 local staff	Rent free			612
Copenhagen	Dec. 46	P-5, 6 local staff	29 819	Jan. 89		37 605
Dakar	April 64	P-5, 4 local staff	Rent free			
Dar es Salaam	June 61	4 local staff	Rent free	1961		
Dhaka	Aug. 81	4 local staff	10 000	Aug. 81		3 750
Harare	Nov. 82	P-5, 5 local staff	Rent free			
Islamabad	March 51	P-4, 7 local staff	10 500			5 657
Jakarta	Aug. 85 (reopened)	4 local staff	Rent free		Services of 2 watchmen	

Centre	Established	Department of Public Information posts	Rental of premises in 1994 (US$)	Host government support		
				Agreement signed	Extrabudgetary staff costs	Cash contribution received for 1994 (US$)
Kabul c/	Oct. 59		2 400			
Kathmandu a/	April 64	4 local staff	4 000			Not received since 1993
Khartoum	Oct. 63	4 local staff	Rent free	May 63		
Kinshasa a/	July 64	5 local staff	800			
Lagos	May 67	P-4, 5 local staff	Rent free	Nov. 64	2 local staff	Not received for 1994
La Paz a/	Sept. 63	3 local staff	8 300			Not received for 1994
Lima	April 60	6 local staff	27 940			
Lisbon	Nov. 77	P-4, 3 local staff	Rent free	Sept. 78	2 local staff	100 470
Lome a/	May 62	4 local staff	Rent free			
London	Jan. 47	7 local staff	152 150 d/			
Lusaka	Oct. 75	4 local staff	Rent free			
Madrid	May 86	P-5, 4 local staff	Rent free			63 607
Managua a/	July 84		Rent free	April 84	3 local staff	16 000
Manama	Nov. 77		Rent free	Dec. 74 & Jan. 77	3 local staff	33 000 from Government of Bahrain
Manila	Aug. 53	D-1, 4 local staff	Rent free	1977		
Maseru a/	Feb. 79	3 local staff	Rent free			
Mexico City	Aug. 47	P-5, 6 local staff	110 000 e/			
Monrovia c/	Oct. 50					
Moscow	April 48	6 local staff	20 116			
Nairobi	Aug. 74	4 local staff	Rent free	Nov. 74		
New Delhi	Jan. 47	7 local staff	50 000 (maintenance)			
Ouagadougou	April 82	P-4, 5 local staff	Rent free	June 82		
Panama City a/	Sept. 84	2 local staff	Rent free	Oct. 82	Services of 3 local staff	
Paris	March 47	D-1, 8 local staff	Rent free			5 524
Port of Spain	Jan. 62	P-4, 5 local staff	28 400	1961		2 131

Centre	Established	Department of Public Information posts	Rental of premises in 1994 (US$)	Host government support		
				Agreement signed	Extrabudgetary staff costs	Cash contribution received for 1994 (US$)
Prague	Dec. 47	P-4, 4 local staff	200			
Rabat	Dec. 62	5 local staff	14 500			Not received since 1993
Rio de Janeiro	March 47	P-5, 6 local staff	Rent free	1		Not received since 1992
Rome	July 58	D-1, 5 local staff	450			
Sana'a	April 94	P-3, 1 local staff	6 000	May 94		
San Salvador f/	July 60					
Sydney	Nov. 48	5 local staff	47 000			
Tehran	May 50	P-4, 2 local staff	3 500			
Tokyo	April 58	7 local staff	262 000			100 000 for public information activities
Tripoli	Jan. 80		Rent free	May 77	5 local staff	Not received since 1993
Tunis	May 60	P-5, 4 local staff	Rent free			
Washington	Oct. 46	P-5, 6 local staff	110 212			
Windhoek	Oct. 92	P-5, 4 local staff	300			
Yangon a/	June 59	4 local staff	7 200			
Yaounde	Oct. 65	P-4, 5 local staff	Rent free	March 94	2 local staff	Not received since 1990

a/ Integrated centres.

b/ Rent under negotiation with landlord.

c/ Not operational.

d/ Relocated in 1994. Rent in 1995 107,000.

e/ The Government of Mexico provides an annual contribution equivalent to $60,000 to be divided among United Nations offices sharing premises.

f/ Public information activities of the Department of Public Information undertaken in collaboration with ONUSAL at present time.